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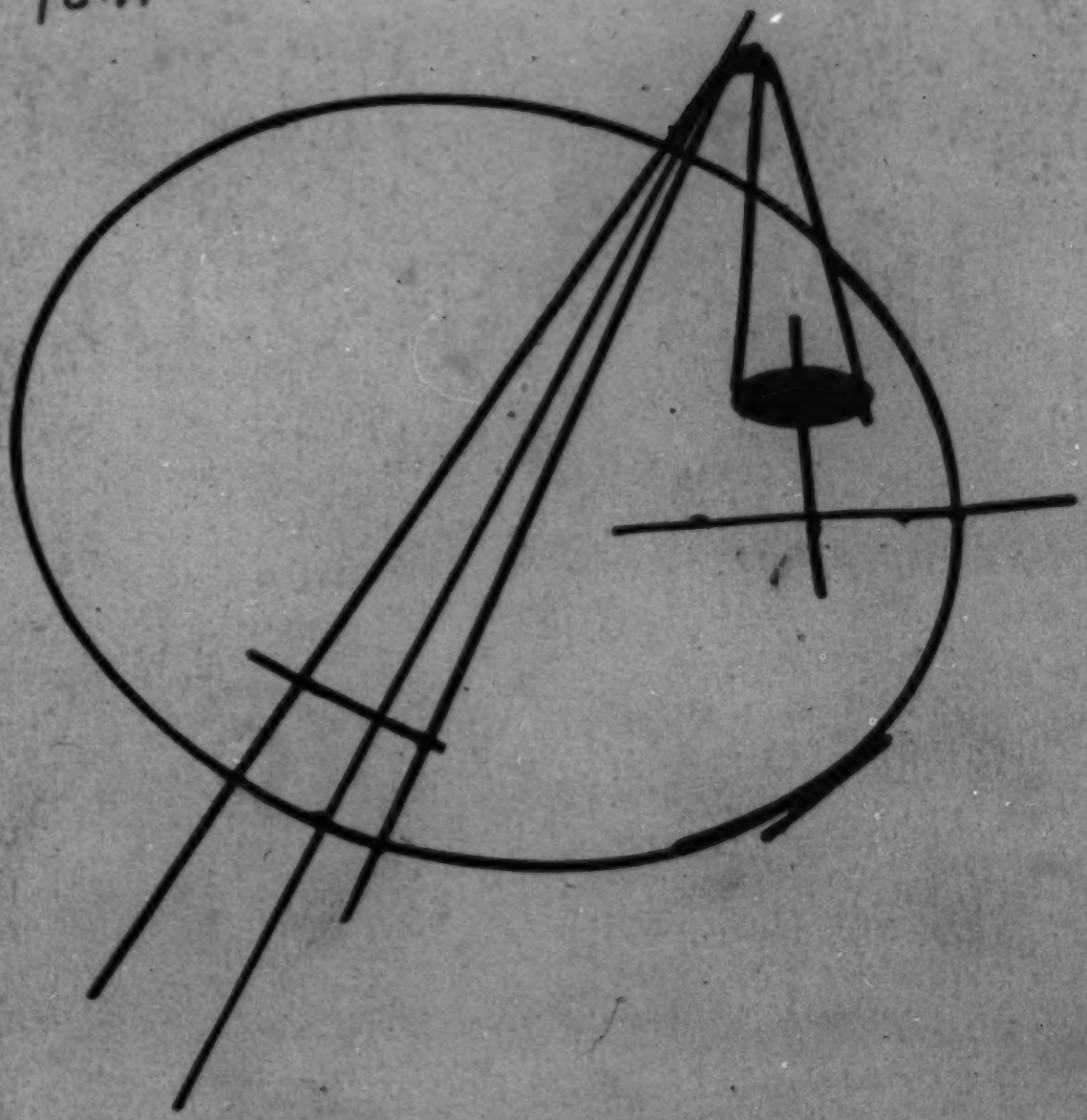

REG BUTLER

REG BUTLER

January 11 – February 5
1955

CURT VALENTIN GALLERY
32 EAST 57 STREET · NEW YORK

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REG BUTLER

(HERTFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND: 1913-)

IN EVERY COUNTRY there are statues that have gained the reputation of possessing magic powers acquired in addition to the emotional quality of their presence. The Colossi of Memnon groan as they receive the first rays of the rising sun, images of the Virgin shed tears and the wounds of Christ reopen, idols with or without the assistance of a retinue of priests manifest by signs that they contain the life of a god. But the artist of our times must rely on his own unaided skill to entice the living spirit into his work, ensure that it dwells there and becomes apparent

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to the spectator. This is precisely what Reg Butler manages to achieve.

It would be presumptious for me to attempt to interpret Butler's intentions. All I can do is to describe his background and the effect that his work has on me personally. He is a man well founded in the traditions of epicurean philosophy and classical architecture, both of which subjects he has studied from his youth. He has an acute faculty for criticism and an unusually convincing and lucid way of talking about his views on sculpture. Two important assets enable him to put his ideas into practice. The first is his approach to sculpture through architecture. Though he abandoned this profession, he is still a builder of statues and a calculator of emotional stresses and strains rather than a carver who hews an image from rock or wood. The second is the facility with which he is able to handle metal and devise new techniques. The possibilities offered by modern processes and tools are eagerly exploited by him in ways that produce a harmony of material and intention. Iron and bronze lend themselves readily to forms of expression in which he uses both their rugged, lacerating qualities as well as their inviting smoothness. But he has no respect for the material itself in the sense demanded by those who insist that "truth to material" is an axiom of good sculpture and who find virtue in treating stones reverently as stones and iron as iron. Reg Butler on the contrary, is capable of painting or gilding his bronze so as to prevent it from looking like itself. He considers his material only as a means to an end and finds it embarrassing if it asserts itself overmuch in its own natural condition. He prefers it to assume an impersonal role and if necessary has no scruple in altering its appearance.

Reg Butler's forms are basically human and like the human frame they are hollow. His earlier figures existed as linear shapes in wrought-iron, united by interpenetration of the essential elements of their structure. More recently his mastery of other mediums leads him to present us with surfaces which hide the inner void but still leave us conscious of vital forms within. There is continuous play between the receptive aspects cavernous interiors, limbs, like radar antennae, stretching towards

invisible and inaudible waves and the aggressive fullness of form, ready to penetrate like a battering ram.

These figures are not solidly based on earth but practice levitation. They are airborne and the upward gaze of their taunt, phallic heads lifts them even further from the ground, raising them in the imagination to the dimensions of inter-stellar space.

By its sense of scale Reg Butler's work often suggests monumental proportions. The diminutive maquette he produced for the "Unknown Political Prisoner Competition" was sufficient to convince the judges who awarded him the prize, of the grandeur of his conception. He delights not only in deluding our sense of proportion but also in creating symbols of dynamic forces that are in perpetual movement. Without employing unwieldy dimensions, he can make us feel the weight of a mass tugged downwards by gravity and threatening to crush us like ants or force us to swing helplessly with his tortured but recognizably female figures, straining at their guide lines and writhing on the spears by which they are impaled. They swim, fly or are about to crash, while the earth beneath prepares their imprint in anticipation of their fall. The weight of the body has drained the flesh from their limbs, their breasts in erection tear through the air, the violence of

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their movement holds them captives of their ecstatic fate.

Even the more static figures are not without some form of movement but movement that is unlike that of Baroque statues with windswept draperies, in that it originates from within. The girl struggling to be free of her shirt is accomplishing no light hearted gesture but rather a painful, inevitable ritual of self-exposure. The effort in her arms makes itself felt through her slim body, her gaping thighs, even to her ankles which float insulated from the earth from which her eyes are turned away.

The human body has been considered as a masterly piece of plumbing, but plumbing implies an in-flow and an exit. The human head absorbs through its senses and emits through eyes as sharp as nails or by tongues that grow like swords from the soil. The mouth like moist earth opens respectfully around it to show the depths at which germination has taken place. Each limb is significant of the action it performs. Heads possess the arrogance of a trumpet and the menace of a bludgeon. The hand that wipes the eye participates in its sorrow.

Reg Butler patiently and dramatically invites us to explore our human structure and condition. The originality of his work lies more than anywhere in his ability to link the inner experience of life with the outer world of fact. This human frame, our palace or our prison, is not only the seat of our joys and our torments but is also the victim of vicissitudes from without. Thanks to his acute sense of tensions and resistances

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material in this artist's hands becomes endowed with an emotional image of the structure of life.

Roland Penrose

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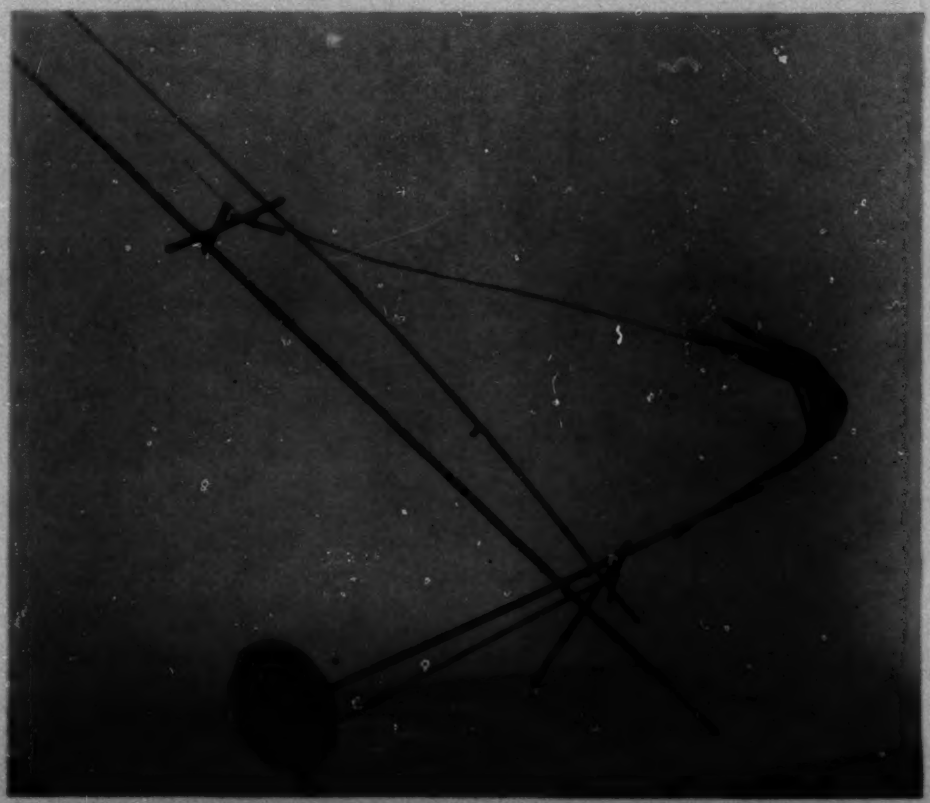

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CATALOGUE

1 **HEAD AND SHOULDERS**
1945. Shell bronze. H. 5"

2 **GIRL WITH SURFBOARD**
1948. Shell bronze. H. 13"
Miss Betty Pepis

3 **TORSO**
1950. Iron. H. 57"

4 **WOMAN WALKING**
1951. Bronze. H. 20¼"
Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Maremont

5 **INSECT**
1951. Bronze and wire.
H. 3½"
Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Zimmermann

6 **YOUNG WOMAN**
1951. Copper wire. H. 18¾"

7 **RECLINING FIGURE**
1951. Wire. L. 9"
Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Rothschild

8 **ROSAMOND**
1951/52 Shell bronze.
H. 11½"

9 **ARCHAIC HEAD**
1952. Shell bronze. L. 11"

10 **SPACE STUDY**
1952. Bronze wire. H. 8"

11 **TWO WOMEN**

1952. Shell bronze. H. 8¾"

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Rosenberg

12 **BIRD**

1952. Shell bronze. H. 15"

13 **MAQUETTE FOR "UNKNOWN POLITICAL PRISONER"**

1952. Bronze, wire and plaster. H. 18"

The Museum of Modern Art

14 **CIRCE HEAD**

1952/53. Shell bronze. H. 15"

15 **STUDY FOR A SACRIFICIAL FIGURE**

1952. Bronze and wire. L. 11"

16 **CHILD WITH A STICK**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 8½"

Mrs. Howard Sloan

17 **CASSANDRA**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 27"

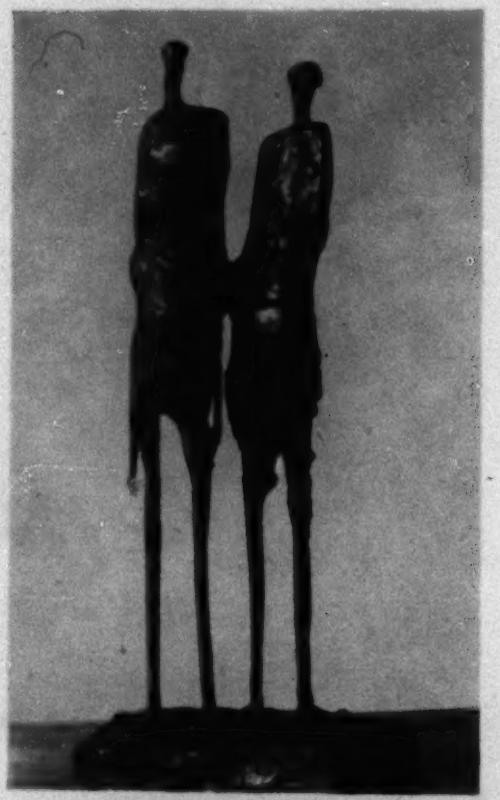
18 **MANIPULATOR**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 30"

Mr. G. David Thompson

19 **MANIPULATOR**

1953/54. Shell bronze. H. 50"



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20 **BOX**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 16"

Mr. G. David Thompson

21 **BOX**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 10"

22 **THE COSMOS**

1953. Bronze and wire. L. 10"

23 **WOMAN ON BOAT**

1953. Shell bronze. L. 27"

24 **MACHINE**

1953. Shell bronze. L. 22"

25 **ST. CATHERINE**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 30"

26 **ST. CATHERINE**

1953. Shell bronze. L. 35"

27 **ST. CATHERINE**

1953. Shell bronze. L. 17½"

28 **STUDY FOR A FALLING FIGURE**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 22"

29 **THE DESCENT**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 26"

Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Rothschild

30 **GIRL**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 14¾"

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hirshhorn

31 **STUDY FOR GIRL WITH A VEST**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 35"

Mr. G. David Thompson

32 **THE PEOPLE ARE TOO SMALL**

1953. Shell bronze. H. 26½"

33 **GIRL WITH A VEST**

1953/54. Shell bronze. H. 68"

34 **STUDY FOR THE THIRD WATCHER**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 30"

35 **FETISH**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 22"

36 **GIRL**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 21"

37 **STUDY FOR GIRL**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 19½"

38 **STUDY FOR GIRL WITH CHEMISE**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 18½"

39 **STUDY FOR GIRL DOING UP BODICE**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 17½"

40 **STUDY FOR GIRL DOING UP BODICE**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 16¾"

41 **STUDY FOR GIRL BENDING OVER**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 17"

42 **MANIPULATOR**

1954. Shell bronze. H. 67"

Watercolors, Drawings and Lithographs

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